

## **Together or We Fall** by Pavel Mikhailovich Florensky

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**Summary:** This is an AU. Will Byers goes missing after playing D&D with his three closest friends: Max, Lucas, and Dustin. While searching for the boy, the trio finds three traumatized kids in the woods. Who are they? Why do they seem to know things? Where is Will?

## **Together or We Fall**

**Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things, Netflix, or any related intellectual property. This is a fan-created work intended to entertain those who greatly enjoyed the original work.**

**This is an AU story that makes the following changes:**

- 1) "The Party" consists of Max, Lucas, Dustin, and Will.**
- 2) Steve, Jonathan, and Nancy are all friends (I don't have the time of day for Tommy or Carol.)**
- 3) Joyce and Hopper are exactly the same as in the real ST.**
- 4) Barb moved away years ago and is living her awesome life without lame friend drama or monsters.**
- 5) Suzzie is going to be a main character. There is a seventh child in this story, so there's a "subtle" hint.**

**Things that happen exactly like the canon universe may be alluded to or assumed. Let me know if any part of my narrative doesn't make sense.**

**I hope you enjoy this story. Please leave a review with your thoughts, reactions, and suggestions.**

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It was November 1983 in the small town of Hawkins, Indiana. A child named Will Byers had disappeared after playing Dungeons and Dragons with his three best friends: Max Mayfield, Lucas Sinclair, and Dustin Henderson. While the search is getting underway three mysteries emerge at Benny's Burgers...

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Benny Hammond considered himself to be a nice man but he was filled with rage when he caught the sight of three boys stealing fries from his kitchen. Yelling out and running towards them, he was surprised when he cornered them: two were girls and all three were wearing hospital gowns. Later they were sitting at a table, and he had

given the children some real food before questioning them.

"I need to ask you guys some questions. Okay?" Benny asked. The three looked at each other before the shorter girl and boy both settled their gazes on the other girl. They clearly expected her to take the lead in interacting with him.

"Where did you guys come from? Did you run away? Where are your parents?" the man gently probed of the singled out girl. None of them responded at first until he began to pull the food baskets away. Each suddenly looked panicked so he suggested a compromise: "You get these back when you start answering my questions."

She stared back at him until he continued: "My name is Benny. Nice to meet you. And you are?...Eleven? What's that mean?". He gestured to her tattoo.

"No," the girl whispered.

"No what?" Benny asked. When she did not answer he began to carry away the food. All three looked concerned and the girl stood slightly in protest.

"Eleven," the girl said while pointing to herself. Then she gestured to the others in turn and referred to the boy as "Twelve" and the smaller girl as "Thirteen."

Benny returned the food and went to call Social Services. There was obviously something very wrong about the state these three kids were in.

By nightfall Benny had coaxed the kids into donning old T-shirts, though none were speaking beyond the basic "yes" or "no" responses to his requests. Moments later, the kind man would be dead at the hand of Connie Frazier and the three kids would be out the door and gone.

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Max, Dustin, and Lucas were entering the forest to search for Will in the rain when Max heard a noise.

"Do you guys hear that?" she asked. Suddenly their flashlights

illuminated three figures in loose-fitting yellow T-shirts. After the shock and some brief discussions they decided to take the kids to Dustin's cellar next to his house. His mother was unlikely to notice and they were relatively nearby. Once they got there, the three present members of the Party evaluated their find.

"Who are you?" Max asked. Lucas and Dustin made some more aggressive lines of questioning before Max motioned for them to stop. She addressed her friends: "You're scaring them. Let me handle this. Why were you out there?".

The three looked back at her silently before the girl in the middle spoke up: "Running. Bad men. No questions."

"We need to tell your mom. These guys are weird," Lucas said.

"We can't do that without revealing that we were out searching," Max said.

"True. How do we handle this, though? They were just in the woods," Lucas replied.

"I'll go get some dry clothes and blankets from my room. They'll have to stay here tonight and then we can find a way to let my mom 'find' them in the morning. Okay?" Dustin recommended before Max and Lucas nodded. "I'll be right back," he said before dashing up the stairs and towards his bedroom window.

A few minutes later Dustin reappeared with an armful of fabric and a small bag of nougat. All three mysterious kids flinched when the cellar door slammed.

"It's okay. Just the door," Dustin said softly. The curly-haired boy then passed the blankets out and provided each with a set of clothes that was obviously too large for them.

Max and Lucas began to depart later when the red-haired girl asked the boy: "Do you think they'll be alright here?".

"Let's just say I'm glad they aren't at my house," Lucas replied as they left for the night.

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After changing, for which Dustin had turned to face the wall, the three guests were wrapped in blankets. Dustin felt sorry for the clearly traumatized kids. He wanted to make them feel better so he decided to try to coax words out of the two who hadn't spoken before.

First, he walked towards the boy with short black hair. "Hi. I'm Dustin. What's your name?". Instead of the answer he sought the boy's eyes widened and he moved towards the girl who had already spoken. She put her arm on his and moved to stand in between the two boys. Dustin sighed and moved instead towards the girl. She squinted at him slightly and he smiled at her.

She smiled back and Dustin decided to try again: "Dustin. I'm Dustin. What's your name?".

The girl hesitated and Dustin thought he should just give up before she spoke softly: "Thirteen."

"Thirteen? Like the number?" Dustin asked. She nodded.

"Okay. I can go with that I guess," Dustin mumbled before offering her a nougat. She took it cautiously before putting it in her mouth and chewing. A wide smile came across her face and Dustin formed his own to match it. Glancing at her companions, the girl nodded at Dustin and they came closer.

"Eleven," the other girl said while pointing to herself. She then used her hand on the boy's arm to pull him gently forward. He complied without a struggle.

"Twe-Twelve," he stuttered while pointing in the same way.

"Eleven, Twelve, and Thirteen," Dustin listed off while looking at the three in turn. They all nodded. Dustin looked at them a few moments longer, primarily at Thirteen, before walking to the stairs. "I'll be back in the morning. Goodnight," he said before heading back to his own room.

"Goodnight," Thirteen said softly as the door closed.

Twelve breathed a large sigh of relief now that he was alone with the

two girls. He let go of Eleven but stayed close to her side. Thirteen approached the bag of nougat her new friend had left behind. She ate another before offering some to her companions. The boy and girl studied her face carefully before taking a couple of the candies for themselves. After eating the food, the three laid down with their blankets and Thirteen stared at the lightbulb until it fizzled and popped into darkness.

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The next morning Dustin snuck out of his room at the crack of dawn to approach his overnight guests with breakfast and the plan. Opening the door he tried unsuccessfully to turn on the light. It must have gone out; the poor kids. The bang of the door jerked all three of them awake and the boy once again looked to the girl called Eleven for guidance. She shook her head and turned to face the descending boy. Thirteen looked inquisitively at the things in his arms: another bag of nougat and some frozen waffles he had warmed. The girl nearly jumped him to get at the nougat while the other two accepted his offer of the waffles.

"Good morning guys. I guess that answers my question about hunger. So here's the plan: I'm going to go back to the house and then a few minutes later you guys need to knock on the front door and pretend not to know me. Don't worry we'll just pretend to meet again. I'll introduce myself and you'll do the same. Then my mom can call whoever needs to be called. She knows what to do in situations like this," Dustin rambled.

Eleven shook her head and Thirteen frowned.

"No," Eleven said firmly.

"No? You don't want my mom to call for help?" Dustin clarified.

"No call. We will stay here," Eleven answered.

"Okay then. Plan B: I'll go pretend to be sick. My mom will leave me here and go to work. Then she'll call the school and let them know I won't be coming today. I'll be back later," Dustin said before leaving again. He did not think about the light being out so darkness covered the three kids again.

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Later when Dustin opened the door to the cellar the there kids were right at the top of the stairs looking at him. Eleven glared, Twelve avoided eye contact, and Thirteen looked relieved. Realizing his mistake, Dustin exclaimed: "I'm so sorry! I didn't think about the light! I'll get another bulb next time. Sorry, guys."

They seemed placated by the apology and followed him to the house where he treated them to a tour. The three kids seemed fascinated by everything. Suddenly Thirteen stopped in front of a photograph in Dustin's bedroom. It was of the Party at the beginning of the school year. Thirteen was pointing at Will.

"Do you know Will? Do you know where he is?" Dustin shouted excitedly.

The girl looked uncertain and looked at the other two who approached slowly. Eleven and Twelve looked at the picture before gasping. Now Dustin knew something was clicking with the little group.

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Lucas and Max came over to Dustin's house after the school under the pretense of checking of their 'sick' friend. When they arrived, Dustin explained the situation with the three kids. As soon as he mentioned recognition of Will's picture, Lucas walked over to Twelve and ignored the boy's fearful look.

"Enough of this. What about Will? You know where he is don't you?" Lucas interrogated. The boy shrank visibly and tried to back away until he hit the wall. Lucas stepped forwards and placed one of his arms between the boy and his companions before speaking again: "Tell me what you know about Will."

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*Flashback: Years Earlier in Hawkins National Lab:*

*Dr. Brenner had been conducting experiments with the three children in his ward. Subject 011 had shown great promise, but the other two less so. Subject 013 was good for little more than manipulating electronics. Subject 012 was the bigger disappointment. He had shown potential as*

*well until he just stopped cooperating. Brenner had managed to have him observe several high security sites and listen in on many secret conversations, but the boy completely balked at the Coke can test and the animal killing test.*

*In his frustration, Brenner had decided that physical pain might be an avenue for manipulation. The boy was coming to fear the sound of Brenner's voice. Lab staff had far fewer reservations using extreme methods on the male child in comparison to the two girls. Beating and slapping accompanied future failures of the boy's experiments. Eventually Mike simply shut down and stopped doing anything, even during the beatings.*

*One day while alone in his confinement cell, Mike was visited in his Void-scape by one of the girls from the lab. Due to her strong powers, Subject 011 was able to interact with him and 013 in the darkened, damp psychic space. Between the secret communications and occasional interactions in the physical world, Twelve became closely bonded with Eleven. He would talk with her and she would comfort him. Thirteen was better able to use language in those years so he tried to teach what he knew to Eleven. The two relied on each other.*

*Within the last year the boy, unbeknownst to his masters, developed the ability to observe the outside world at will and learned that this relationship might be called "love." He watched children in the nearby town play games and run outside. He saw older kids pressing their faces into each others' faces. He observed parents tenderly loving their children. All these things were foreign to him except from the interactions with Eleven.*

*There was one specific incident that was seared into the memory of both Eleven and Twelve. The children were enjoying one of the rare days when they were locked in a room together. Thirteen sat on the bed and colored a piece of paper while looking at her companions occasionally. Eleven and Twelve were sitting on the floor next to the other. The girl had fallen asleep on Twelve's shoulder and he simply enjoyed watching her rest. Suddenly the door burst open and Eleven jerked away. Brenner came before them with two orderlies and looked directly at Twelve. The boy began trembling as the orderlies reached for him.*

*Eleven noticed Twelve's terror and reached out her hand saying, "No. Get*

*away from him." Both lab employees flew backwards and collided with the wall. Brenner looked at Eleven curiously and backed out of the room. As soon as he was gone, Eleven looked at her fellow subjects and the boy threw his arms around her.*

*"Thank you," he sobbed into her hair. She returned his hug and accepted the smile sent her way from Thirteen. Of course, Brenner had eventually gotten his hands on Twelve but the boy now knew that he had someone he could count on. That night in the Void, the three tortured children vowed themselves to each other and swore to escape.*

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"Well, I'm waiting to hear it. The runaround from you three isn't funny anymore. We need to know where our friend is," Lucas said forcibly towards the trapped Twelve. Before he could open his mouth again, Lucas was lifted off his feet and thrown against the opposite wall. Eleven had her hand outstretched towards the boy and an angry look on her face.

"Do not touch him," she said evenly. Max and Dustin looked at each other before looking back at the girl who had used her mind to throw their friend. Lucas stood up slowly and shook his head.

"What the...how did..." Lucas mumbled.

"She just did that with her mind," Dustin said.

"Why did you do that?" Max asked the girl angrily.

"He was scarring Twelve. I won't let you hurt him," Eleven declared.

"I didn't mean to scare him. I just wanted answers. Promise. We won't hurt him," Lucas addressed her reasons. Twelve had now pried himself away from the wall and stood next to Eleven and Thirteen. He nodded at the girl and she softened her stance. The boy now stepped in front of Eleven and looked Lucas in the eyes.

"Y-your friend is in a b-bad p-place. We a-all saw it. D-don't know how to g-get there now. T-the bad m-men a-are the only ones who c-can," the black-haired male stammered. He was clearly in fragile shape, but decided to tell them where their friend was anyways.

"The bad men. Who are they?" Max asked.

"Very bad. They will kill if you go to them," Eleven answered.

"No. Don't do it," Thirteen said while staring at Dustin.

"Okay. We have to find Will, though. What are we going to do?" Max asked.

"We can see him again. Try to find him," Eleven said.

"You can?" Lucas queried.

"Yes. Just need pool and radio," she said with a bit of nervousness.

"Alright. We can go over what you need and how to get it. For now let's go back to the cellar. I'll get a lightbulb and some food. My mom could be home soon, and we don't want her to find you guys. Tomorrow we find Will. Right?" Dustin declared while looking at his friends for confirmation. Max and Lucas both nodded in agreement.

"Okay," Eleven said from across the room. The three numbered kids followed Dustin back to his cellar and waited for him to return with the promised items.